

Are You A Follower Of Jesus?

By: Pastor David T. Holt

*Jesus said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and **follow Me.**" Luke 9:23*

Introduction

The principles contained in this pamphlet could make the difference in where you or someone you love spends eternity. Therefore, I encourage you to read it carefully and prayerfully. After reading it, you may want to pass it on to someone you know and care about.

This pamphlet is a challenge for all of us to examine ourselves to see if we are truly a follower of Jesus. The Bible says, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you - unless, of course, you fail the test?*" (2 Corinthians 13:5-6). Unfortunately, many today who profess to be a Christian may not be at all.

In addition, this pamphlet is for Christian leaders. As we challenge others to become a Christian, let us be sure we do so in the most biblically accurate way. The terms and phrases we use are very important.

It is common in many churches today to ask the question, "Are you saved?" or "Have you received Christ?" Certainly being "saved" and "receiving Christ" are biblical terms. The Apostle John said, "*To as many as **received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God*" (John 1:12). Acts 4:12 tells us that it is only through the Name of Jesus that one can be "saved." In Acts 16:30 they asked, "*What must we do to be **saved?***"

Even though the above phrases (receiving Christ and being saved) are biblical, I want to suggest that we use a more holistic and biblically accurate phrase in describing the Christian life. The phrase I prefer to use is "**follower of Jesus.**" I am concerned that when we speak of "receiving Christ" or "being saved," we are possibly reducing things to a past experience at the expense of the present, ongoing relationship with Jesus that is really what Christianity is all about.

Unfortunately, there are many today who claim to have received Christ, but show no evidence of following Jesus on a daily basis. Many will claim they prayed a prayer to ask Jesus into their heart, they came forward at a church invitation, or they signed a card at a Billy Graham crusade. Is this what being a Christian is all about? Many today are trusting in these past events and thus think they are spiritually secure. However, if they are not presently following Jesus, they are not right with God. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who **says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who **does the will of My Father who is in heaven*****" (Matthew 7:21). The book of 1 John speaks of how to tell if someone is a true Christian. Nowhere does it talk about praying and

asking Jesus into your heart. Instead, 1 John says that a true follower of Jesus will exhibit a lifestyle that includes loving others (4:16), obeying God (2:3), and not habitually sinning (3:6).

Does this mean one has to be perfect to be a Christian? Of course not. Maturity takes time. We should be progressively growing from a spiritual child to a young man to a father (see 1 John 2:12-14). Can we have the assurance of our salvation? Yes we can. 1 John 5:10-15 says that if we have the Son of God in our lives, then we can **know** that we have eternal life. However, part of having the assurance of your salvation should be based on evidence that Christ is working in your life. If you don't see any evidence, then you need to ask yourself whether you are truly a follower of Jesus.

Therefore, rather than ask, "Have you received Christ?" or "Are you saved?" I suggest we ask, "Are you a follower of Jesus Christ?" So, are **you**?

Why the phrase "Follower of Jesus"? I want to suggest four reasons why I prefer the term "follower of Jesus" instead of "receiving Christ" or "being saved."

1. **Jesus used this phrase to call His disciples and others.** Twenty times in the four Gospels we find some version of the phrase "follow Me." "*Then He said to them all: 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and **follow Me**'*" (Luke 9:23). "Follow Me" was the phrase Jesus used more than any other in calling people to a commitment to Him. Jesus was after a lifestyle change and not merely a one-time decision. He expected them to leave their old life and begin the new journey of walking with Him. Let's speak of Christianity more with the term that Jesus used.
2. **Following Jesus communicates more of what being a Christian involves.** Following Jesus includes the receiving part, but it involves much more. Receiving Christ is the beginning of the journey of following Jesus. Receiving Christ gets one on the path, but the path has much more to it than simply the decision to receive Christ. Following Jesus gets at the heart of the Christian life, and that is the ongoing personal relationship that continues through all eternity (see John 17:3).
3. **Following Jesus is a process rather than a point.** Receiving Christ is a point along the way. As stated, it is the beginning point, whereas following Jesus is the entire journey, from beginning to end. Jesus calls us to walk with Him all of our days. Following Jesus from beginning to end is what it means to be a Christian.

4. **Following Jesus is consistent with the biblical doctrine called “the perseverance of the saints.”** Those who are followers of Jesus will persevere to the end. Jesus said, *“If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples”* (John 8:31). Hebrews 3:14 tells us that *“we have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”* Paul said in Colossians, *“He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight ... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel”* (Colossians 1:22-23). The confidence we had at first may have come from an experience of receiving Christ, but holding firm until the end is what it means to be a **follower of Jesus**.

What does following Jesus involve? Now that we have established the biblical superiority of using the phrase “following Jesus,” let us examine what is involved in being a follower of Jesus. Following Jesus involves:

1. **Receiving Jesus.** A follower of Jesus is someone who has repented of his or her sin and received the forgiveness of God through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self and trusting in Christ alone to rescue us from sin (see Acts 20:21). We must recognize how sinful we are and that nothing apart from Jesus can deliver us (see Romans 3). We must transfer trust from self to Christ. *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). Receiving Christ is an act of the will and begins the lifelong journey of following Jesus. None of the other points listed below are possible unless this step has been taken. **Let me make this crystal clear: no one is delivered from sin because of doing the things listed below. These are components to following Jesus that come after one has received Christ by faith.** *“It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are delivered from our sin and brought into a relationship with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The blood of Jesus is what cleanses us from all sin (see 1 John 1:7-9).
2. **Baptism.** Once we place our faith in Christ alone for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God, the next step is to be baptized in water. Baptism is the outward sign of your decision to become a follower of Jesus. It says you are serious about your commitment. It is a way of telling others that you want to follow Jesus. A follower of Jesus follows Jesus, and Jesus was baptized; therefore, His followers need to be baptized. We need to have the attitude found in Acts 10:47: *“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”* Notice that they received and then were baptized. You can read more about baptism in my pamphlet “Biblical Baptism.”
3. **Loving Jesus.** When Jesus was asked to summarize

all of the Law and prophets, He said, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:28-32). **Maintaining a love relationship with Jesus is the most important component to being a follower of Jesus.** It is all about our relationship with God. We love Him because He first loved us (see 1 John 4:19). Everything else (obedience, responsibilities, etc.) should flow out of our love relationship with Christ. You cannot love somebody that you do not know, and you cannot know somebody that you do not spend time with. Therefore, as followers of Jesus we need to seek Him.

4. **Seeking Jesus.** *“I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare, and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope... you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Because our sins are forgiven and we have a relationship with God, we will want that relationship to grow. And we grow in knowing Jesus and following Jesus by spending time with Jesus. Therefore, a follower of Jesus must spend time with God in the Word and in prayer for the purpose of getting to know Him better, discovering the blessings we have in Christ, and learning His will. Jesus’ disciples spent much time with Him. We must do the same. For more information on having a meaningful time alone with God each day, please read my pamphlet called “Time Alone With God.” As we spend time with Jesus and discover His will, we will increasingly surrender to His Lordship.
5. **Surrender.** Jesus surrendered His all for us. Therefore, out of gratitude and loyalty to Him, followers of Jesus will surrender to Him. Following Jesus means that we do not follow our own way but surrender our will to His will. It means Christ is first in our lives. His ways come before our ways. Jesus said, *“if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”* (Matthew 16:24). To take up one’s cross is to die to one’s own selfish desires. When Jesus called the rich young ruler He said, *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me”* (Mark 10:21). This is a passage many have struggled with, because it almost sounds like Jesus was requiring works in order to be saved. However, Jesus is simply pointing out that following Him involves a total commitment and change of one’s life. Have you consciously and volitionally ever said to God: “Lord, I submit my whole life to You. I surrender every area to You. Take control and have Your way”? If not, why not do it right now? Followers of Jesus say to Him, *“Not my will but Yours be done”* (Luke 22:42). A.W. Tozer once said: “There is no craven division of offices whereby we may acknowledge His Saviorhood today and withhold decision on His Lordship till tomorrow. The true believer owns Christ as his All in All without reservation. He includes all of himself, leaving no part of his being unaffected by the revolutionary transaction.” ²

You might respond, “But this is not easy.” You are right. It is not easy to follow Jesus, especially the more sinful our society becomes. This is one reason God gave us the body of Christ, the church, to assist us in following Jesus.

6. **Fellowship with other followers.** Being a follower of Jesus means that we connect with other followers. We are to love and support one another in our common journey of following Jesus. Loving others is one biblical evidence of being a follower of Jesus. *“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers”* (1 John 3:14). God does not intend for us to be solo Christians. St. Augustine (354 – 430 AD) said you cannot have God as your father, unless you also have the church as your mother. The moment you became a follower of Jesus you became a part of the church, the body of Christ on earth. God designed His body to be a living organism that helps His people in their journey to follow Jesus. *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:24-25). Are you a part of a Bible-believing church? If not, why not? Yes, the church has its faults, but you are still commanded by your Master to be involved in a local church. For more information on finding the right church for you, please read my pamphlet “Selecting the Right Church.”
7. **Obedience.** A follower of Jesus purposes in his heart to obey God. Obedience is another biblical sign that you are a follower of Jesus. *“We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands”* (1 John 2:3). If Jesus is our Lord, then we must obey Him. You cannot say to Jesus, “No, Lord.” If He is your Lord, you say “yes.” There will be times when we want to sin, but as followers of Jesus we say “no” to temptations and choose in the power of the Holy Spirit to obey God and His Word. This pleases God and helps us progress along the path of maturity and Christ-likeness. Furthermore, obedience needs to flow out of a love relationship with Jesus. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will obey My commands”* (John 14:15). He also said, *“He who has My commands and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to Him”* (John 14:21). Notice how Jesus promises to bless (reveal Himself to) the obedient follower. Many times obedience will be difficult. Following Jesus at times involves suffering and hardship. Jesus said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Be encouraged that God will always bless your faithfulness and obedience to Him. Furthermore, part of obedience is service.
8. **Serving.** A follower of Jesus is a servant of the Lord. This means that we serve Christ in some way. Not all are called to become a pastor or a missionary, but all followers of Jesus must find a meaningful place of service, ideally in the local church of which we are a part. Jesus gives us gifts and abilities that He expects us to use in kingdom service. When we serve in our gift areas, we are most fulfilled and fruitful as His disciples. Jesus said, *“Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me”* (John 12:26). How are you serving Jesus? If you are not serving, call your local church today and volunteer to serve in some way.

You might be surprised at how God uses you and how much you enjoy serving.

9. **Trusting Jesus.** A follower of Jesus is someone who trusts God daily with his life and future. This means we place our life into His hands. We give Him control of our life and rest in His love and care and provision. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Trust grows with time. Trust is a by-product of knowing God. You cannot trust someone you do not know. As you grow to love and know God, your trust in Him will increase. *“Those who know Your name will trust in You”* (Psalms 9:10).
10. **Enjoying the benefits of walking with Him.** Sometimes we focus too much on the cost of following Jesus. And there is a cost. I have spoken of this cost throughout this pamphlet. However, there are also **many** benefits. I was a business major in undergraduate school. I learned in school that successful companies frequently do a cost/benefit analysis when they are faced with a decision. I would suggest that people do this in deciding whether to become a follower of Jesus. Following Jesus will **cost** you. It will cost you your pride, your selfishness, doing what you want to when you want to, your sin, and your eternal home with Satan in hell. On the other hand, following Jesus will **benefit** you by giving you forgiveness of your sins, a relationship with God, a new identity, a new connection with others in the body, the indwelling power of God, the fruit of the Spirit, hope for the future, promises in God’s Word to claim, and a home with God forever in heaven! Sound like a good deal? It should, because it is a good deal!
11. **Continuing with Christ until the end.** Following Jesus involves following Him all the way until our last breath. When we decide to follow Him, we are committing ourselves to following Him the whole way. We do not get off when the going gets rough. *“But Christ is faithful as a Son over God’s house. And we are His house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast”* (Hebrews 3:6). One of the greatest privileges in all of life would be to hear Jesus say on judgment day, *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness”* (Matthew 25:21)!

Final Challenge

Following Jesus is the greatest adventure in the world. Following Jesus is what you were created by God to experience. This is what life is all about. **Are you a follower of Jesus?**

Now you know what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Perhaps when you first “received Christ” you did not know about following Jesus. Well, now you do. Perhaps after reading this you realize you are not a follower of Jesus.

Well, you can become one today.

Will you resolve this day to become a follower of Jesus? You know now what is involved and what you are “signing

up for.” If you do decide to become a follower of Jesus, you will never regret it. If you decide not to follow Jesus, there will be eternal consequences. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

Perhaps you were once a follower of Jesus (or thought you were), but now you realize you are not following Him. Will you resolve to once again get back on that path of following Him? When the prodigal son came to his senses and returned to his father, the father ran to meet him, embraced him, forgave him, and fully restored him into fellowship (see Luke 15:11-32). That is exactly what your Heavenly Father will do for you, if you turn back to Him and surrender your life to Him.

Perhaps you are a sincere follower of Jesus, but this pamphlet has shown you some areas in which you are not yielding to Jesus. Allow the Lord to search your heart. Acknowledge your sin, receive God's forgiveness, surrender that area(s) to Him, and ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit. **Today can be the first day of the rest of your life!**

It is impossible to be a faithful follower of Jesus in your own strength. You have neither the power nor the resources to follow Jesus. You can only do it in the power of the Holy Spirit by allowing Jesus to live through you. The Apostle Paul said, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but **Christ lives in me**. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). Jesus said to His followers before He ascended, *“You shall receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes upon you”* (Acts 1:8). Even though His disciples had been with Him for three years, Jesus still told these followers to wait until they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit before beginning to carry out His will. We should not try for one minute to follow Jesus without the filling of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God gives us the power to follow Him. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit right now. *“Do not be drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Holy Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18). All Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), but not all Christians are filled. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

After reading this, it is time for the most important decision of your life. **Will you become a follower of Jesus?**

“Choose you this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15). Jesus said, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14). Will you find it? *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and **follow Me**”* (Luke 9:23). Will you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him in your daily life?

Prayer

Lord God, I admit that I have been going my own way. I am a sinner. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for my sin. I surrender my life to You. I invite You, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come into my life, forgive me of my sin, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I commit myself today to the lifelong adventure of following You. I die to my old life and choose right now to follow Jesus for the rest of my days on earth. Lord: lead, guide, and empower my life, for Your glory. Amen

Signed _____

Date _____

If God has used this pamphlet in your life, consider sharing it with a friend or loved one. In addition, I would like to hear from you. Please consider contacting me at:

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The above address is where you can request other materials referred to in this pamphlet. And don't forget to share the Good News of Jesus with others. *“Come, **follow me**,” Jesus said, “and I will make you **fishers of men**”* (Mark 1:17). May God work in your life in a mighty way as you seek to be a faithful **follower of Jesus**.

¹All Scriptures are from the New International Version and all emphases are mine.

²A.W. Tozer, *The Best of A.W. Tozer* (Camp Hill, PA: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 102.

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Pastor David Holt has served as Senior Pastor of First Evangelical Free Church since 1990. He is a graduate of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he earned Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, and Doctor of Ministry degrees. He is married to Dede and they have four children.

